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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001760

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PTER PREL PGOV ASEC TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: A NEW FRONT FOR INTERNATIONAL TERROR

REF: A) ISTANBUL 1703 & 1711 B) ISTANBUL 1744 & 1752

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b & d)

**¶11. (U) Summary:** Istanbul is slowly recovering from the shock of two separate sets of terrorist bombings that claimed over 50 lives and wounded 750 in one week. Although both the synagogue bombings (ref a) and the latest bombings of the British Consulate and HSBC Turkey headquarters (ref b) appear to have had specific targets, there is little doubt among public opinion that Turkey has become a new front for the war against international terror. Even as investigators continue their search for the perpetrators and their accomplices, there is widespread speculation regarding the possible motives, targets, and messages of the attacks. Despite some calls for disassociating Turkey from U.S. policies in Iraq and Israel, the attacks do not appear to have changed people's minds, but only to have reinforced what people already believed. End Summary.

**¶12. (U) Who dunnit?:** Public reaction to the attacks has moved from shock to anger. The thrust of the anger appears to be directed at a faceless, nebulous terrorist threat. Most accept official government statements that the attacks were carried out by Turkish citizens linked to extreme Islamic groups like IBD-C (the Great Islamic Eastern Anatolian Raiders) and Hezbollah (an indigenous Turkish group, reportedly sponsored by Iran). A majority also believe that these groups probably had some support from the Al-Qaeda international terrorist network. On the other hand, there is a minority that questions whether Turks, or at least Islamists, were involved at all. Some believe instead that the terrorists may have been secretly funded and supported by the U.S. or Israel in an effort to poison Turkey against radical Islamic groups (this viewpoint has also been articulated by several television commentators and printed in the local Islamic press). Asked whether such a conspiracy theory seems a little far-fetched, a shopkeeper and barber separately told poloff cryptically that "anything is possible in politics."

**¶13. (U) Why?:** Among those who accept the apparent links with international terrorism, there is still widespread disagreement over what motivated the bombers. Were the attacks designed to send a message to Israel, the U.K. and the U.S.? Or, were they aimed at Turkey for supporting those governments and designed to destabilize Turkey's secular democracy? This debate is likely to continue for some time. Protestors at a "peace rally" over the weekend reflected the diversity of opinions, with some calling for cutting ties with the U.S. and others calling for greater international cooperation against terrorism. Our sense from our contacts here is that neither Turkey's democracy nor its relationship with the U.S. is directly threatened in the wake of these attacks.

**¶14. (U) What now?:** Hotels and shopkeepers are already lamenting the negative impact that these attacks have had on one of the city's economic mainstays: tourism. Shopkeepers in the Grand Bazaar remarked that the flow of visiting tourists had slowed to a trickle since the attacks. The Four Seasons and other five-star hotels have already had numerous cancellations. Most Turks here now anticipate, moreover, that with these attacks some sort of invisible line seems to have been crossed by international terrorists and that there will be more such attacks in the future. Consequently, they are supportive of the government's intentions and efforts to investigate, apprehend, and prosecute the perpetrators as quickly and efficiently as possible. Asked by poloff what Turkey should do now, a taxi driver shrugged and said that Turkey "must continue to work with other countries in the struggle against international terrorism."

**¶15. (C) Comment:** Reaction to the attacks is still settling in, but like Americans after September 11, many here see that their world has changed and wonder what will happen next. This reflectiveness does not characterize everyone, of course: those who were previously anti-American and did not believe that al-Qaeda carried out the September 11 attacks

have not abandoned their views, but now want to see a U.S. hand either directly or indirectly causing the attack on Turkey. But the mainstream of the population, including the Government and Security Services, seems to recognize the international cooperation is essential to fight this scourge and that Turkey's western democratic orientation must continue.

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